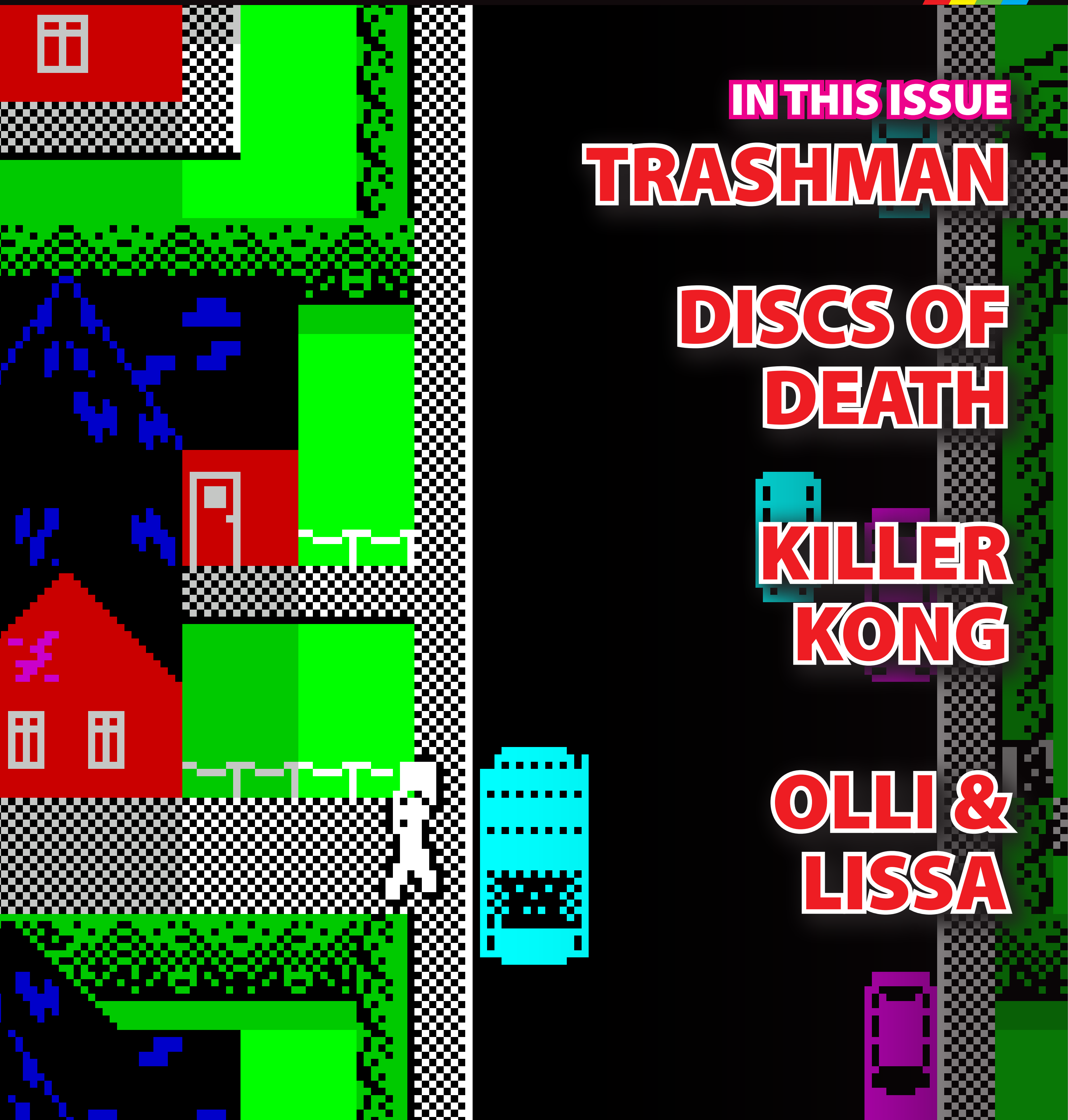
ZX Spectrum GAMER

ISSUE 1 • OCT 2011



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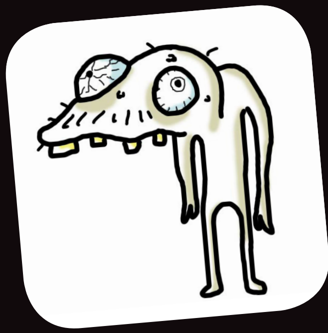
MORE EXCITING THAN A TIN OF SPAM AT THE OPERA

ZXSpec

ctrum GAMER

Issue 1
OCT 2011

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Greetings, Spec-chums, to the first issue of ZX Spectrum Gamer, a magazine so soaked in nostalgia that it would take the fiery breath of Thanatos himself to dry it out.

The Spectrum was the beginning of home gaming for many people, opening up new worlds and possibilities that were previously unimaginable, and I hope to bring back some of those fine memories.

If you want to contact the magazine to offer comments or suggestions, or if you have a personal problem you'd like clearing up, or perhaps just want to draw me a picture of some flowers or something, then drop me a mail at the address above.

The next issue will be available when I write it, or perhaps a little later than that if nobody reads this one. Boing.

sunteam_paul

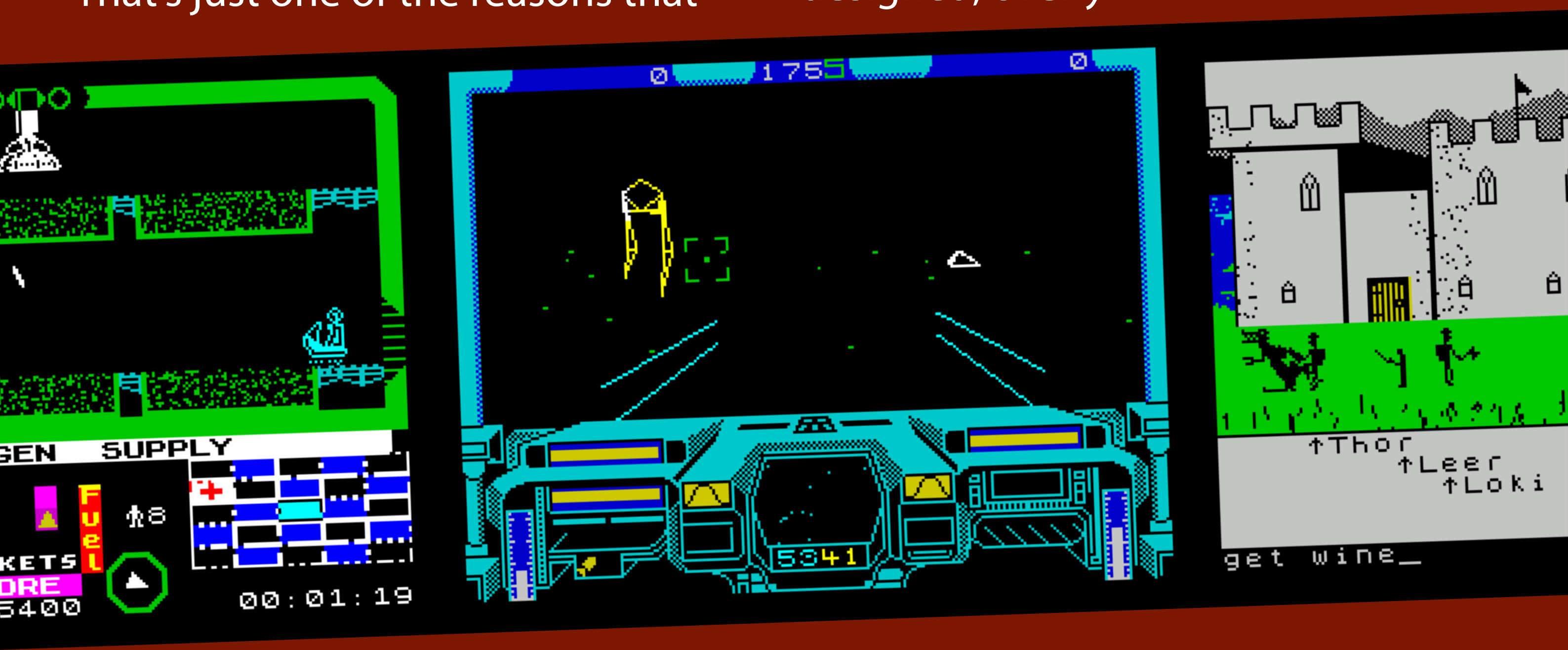
WELCOME

"Imagination will often carry us to worlds that never were. But without it we go nowhere." **Carl Sagan**

Let's face it, it takes a lot of imagination to play Speccy games, but that's the beauty of them. While flying around in something like Starglider, you may see a few yellow lines and dots jerking across the screen, but inside your head the brain is creating a vast and futuristic landscape. The simple, blocky artwork of Valhalla manages to inspire images of magnificent Norse castles and ancient warriors. The backgrounds in Marsport are amplified in your mind, forming a living, breathing and exciting science fiction universe for you to play in.

That's just one of the reasons that I love going back to them. With today's games we are spoonfed with complete, realistic worlds. There is no room for the imagination any more, because the designers have done all the hard work for us. While much has been gained in the last 30 years, it can also be said that some things have been lost. The brain is a wonderful organ, and can fill in the blanks with not just imagery, but with emotion.

I'm not one of these angry retro guys that thinks all games were better back then. In fact, you'll find most of them simplistic, poorly designed, overly



difficult and ugly. But they deserve to be remembered, not least for the creativity of the people that made them; there is no other platform on which you will find the sheer diversity of game concepts than on our rubber keyed friend.

I grew up with a ZX Spectrum. It was my first proper gaming machine and moulded much of what I am today, and there is still something about the games that captures the mind. It's great to exercise my imagination as I used to when I was a child, and there's nothing more irresistible than pure nostalgia.

This is why I love the Spectrum.

This is the reason for this magazine.

I hope you enjoy it.

sunteam_paul

HOW THE MIND WORKS

This should have been a picture of a brain, but I mistyped it in Google. Sorry.





Strangeloop, Starglider, Valhalla, Tau Ceti and Marsport.

TRASHMAN

PUBLISHER: NEW GENERATION SOFTWARE • **YEAR:** 1984 • **MEMORY:** 48K

"I hereby announce the annual board meeting of New Generation Software. Gentlemen, we are here to discuss ideas for our forthcoming games. What was that Jenkins? Chartered Accountancy Simulator? Yes, that sounds very interesting but we need something with a little more pep to it. Yes Smith? Ah, Super Sewage Maintenance Brothers... that's quite exciting but don't you think we need something a little more, you know, above ground? Hang on, what's that noise outside? That damn trashman again...wait a minute..."

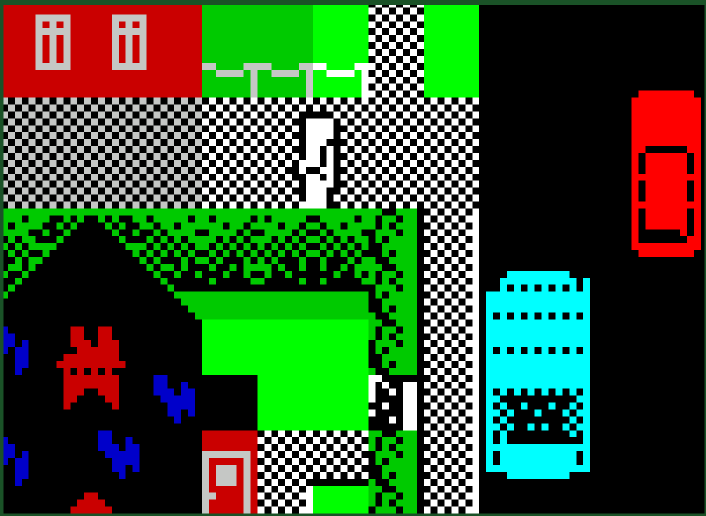


It's either a moment of madness or sheer genius when someone decides that emptying people's bins is the perfect theme for a computer game, especially when you could be off exploring strange alien worlds and murdering exotic creatures instead. Well it might sound about as exciting as a maths exam, but bear with me.



One bite from the pooch and your resulting limp will slow you down.

The whole premise of Trashman is pretty obvious. You have a series of levels, cunningly disguised as 'streets' in which you have to empty the bins of every house in the allotted



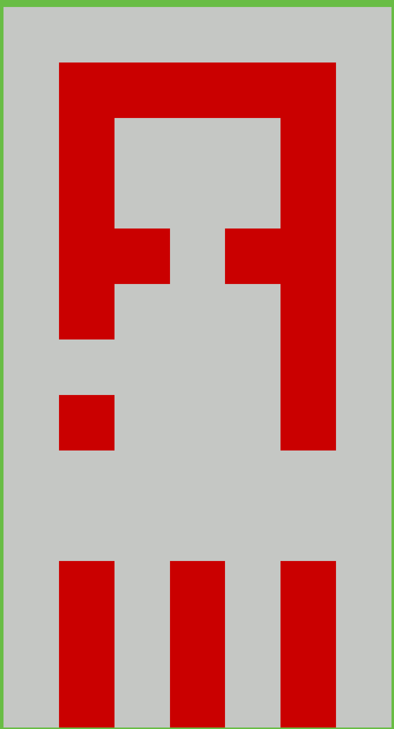
Careful when walking behind bushes, as your timer will rocket down without you noticing.

time. Sounds easy enough, but there are many obstacles to contend with. First, your dustcart driver is an impatient fellow, and keeps moving the van up the road. Second, your bonus timer is constantly counting down and once it reaches zero, it's the dole queue for you. Add to that the speeding cars, lunatic cyclists on the pavement and angry dogs that really don't like it when you step on the grass and you have quite a challenge ahead of you.

But it's not all bad. Sometimes the residents will pop open their front doors and invite you in for a bit of nookie (that's what I like to think anyway) giving you a boost to your bonus timer and making life a lot easier. These little bonuses are essential as without them, your time will be running out faster than Charlie Sheen's career.

THINGS PEOPLE SAY

The residents have a lot to say for themselves when inviting you in. They might not exactly be the pinnacle of wit these days, but it was a pretty neat touch when the game was released.



Do you think I'm a megalomaniac?
Just give me a ZX81 and I'll control the world.

Take this thing away. My son is obsessed with it.
No one will ever believe I've picked up a Spectrum.

Come and see the computer my Auntie gave me.
Oh good! I thought I might need a licence for it.

Could you look at my T.V.?
I meant mend it, not watch it.

Can you help with an anagram? It's I, ENIGMA.
I'm no good at anagrams. I can't even imagine the answer.

Do you want a copy of 3D Monster Maze?
What on earth did you expect? An original?

Do you want a tip?
That's got Trashman worried. I'm his tax inspector.

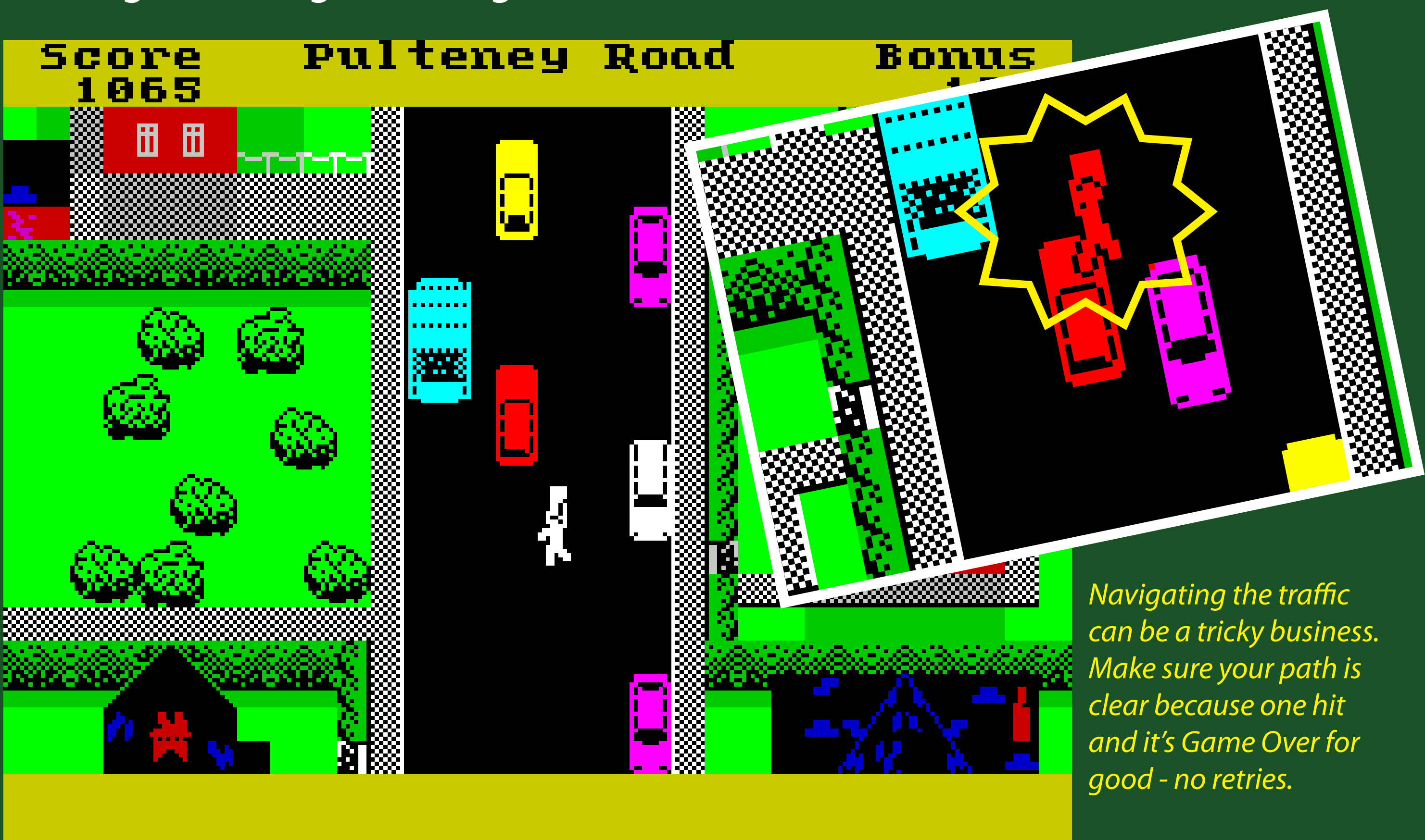
TOP TEN FAMOUS TRASHMEN

1. Charlie Sheen
2. Emilio Estevez
3. Lonnie Donegan's Old Man
3. Erm...that's it.



Golf clap.

Trashman is a typical example of a game concept that just shouldn't work, but does. It's actually quite a clever game design - mixing a race against the clock with frogger-style gameplay and a bit of humour (some of the comments householders make will bring a smile), it all gels together nicely. The graphics are pretty appealing, with a convincing semi-3D effect making good use of BRIGHT settings. Animation is simple, but effective enough, even though trashman looks like he's doing some strange penguin waddle when he walks. The game successfully captures the atmosphere of a nice residential area and it's only lacking the sounds of tweeting birds and children playing to complete the illusion. Speaking of sound, there isn't much of it. There is only the occasional blip when you pick up a bin, open a gate and so on, but that's only to be expected of a title this old.



Navigating the traffic can be a tricky business. Make sure your path is clear because one hit and it's Game Over for good - no retries.



Walk carefully around grass verges. A shortcut might look tempting but you can say bye bye bonus if you do.

It's not an easy game, and you have to aim for perfection to make real progress. Back in the day, I barely used to be able to make it to the third street, but that never really bothered me because I just had fun playing.

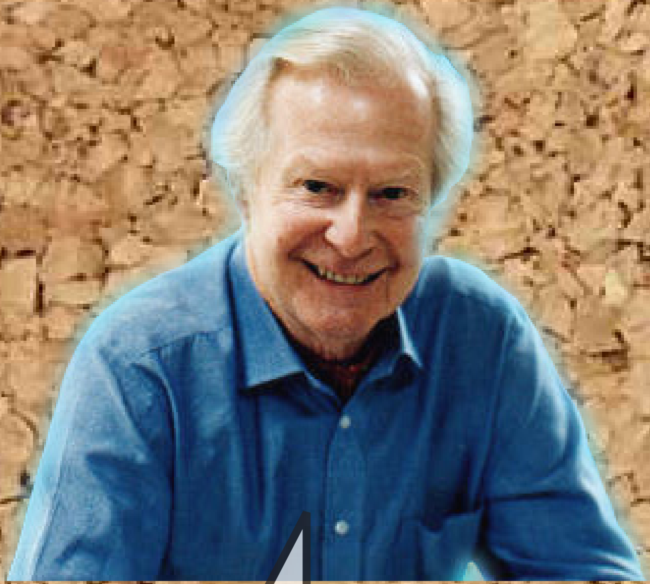
Now, with years of gaming under my belt, I've, erm, really not got that much better at it (curse those speeding motorists!). But do I care? Not a jot, because the life of a Trashman is fun, and that's all that really matters. **SP**

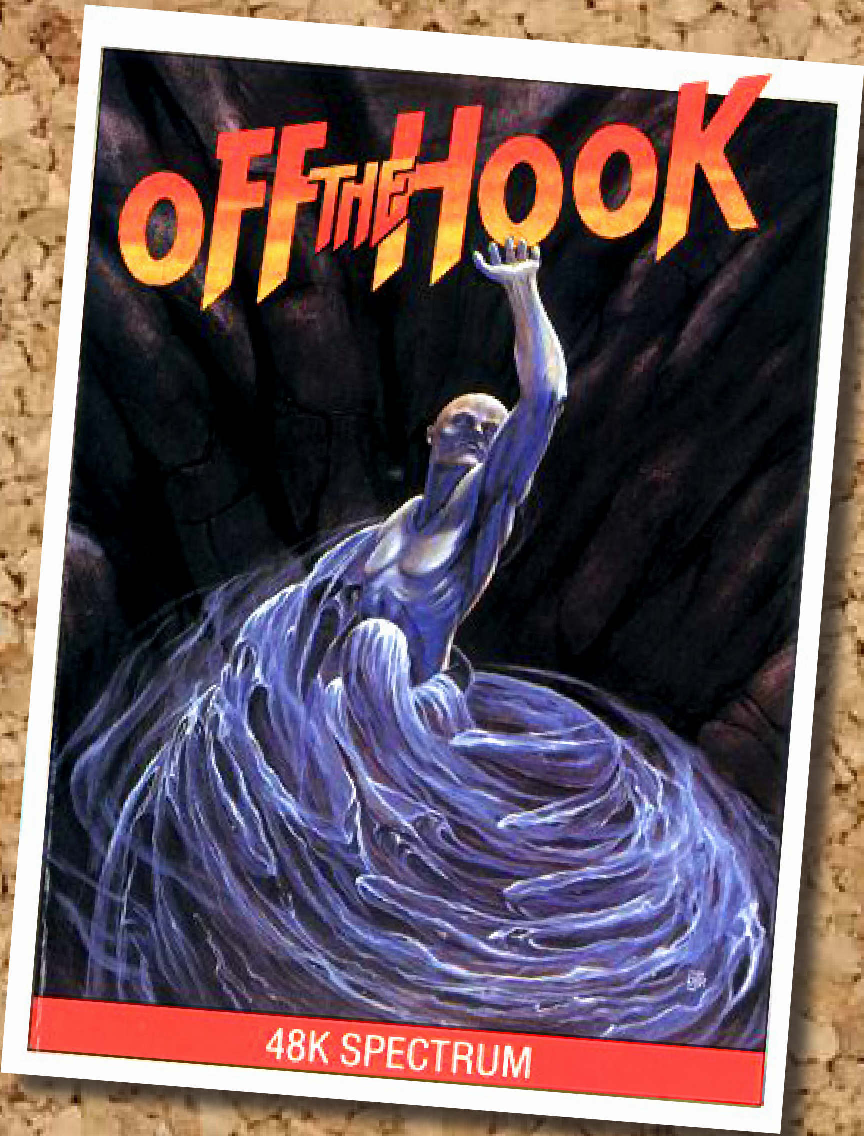


VERDICT: it might be trash but it's certainly not garbage, har.

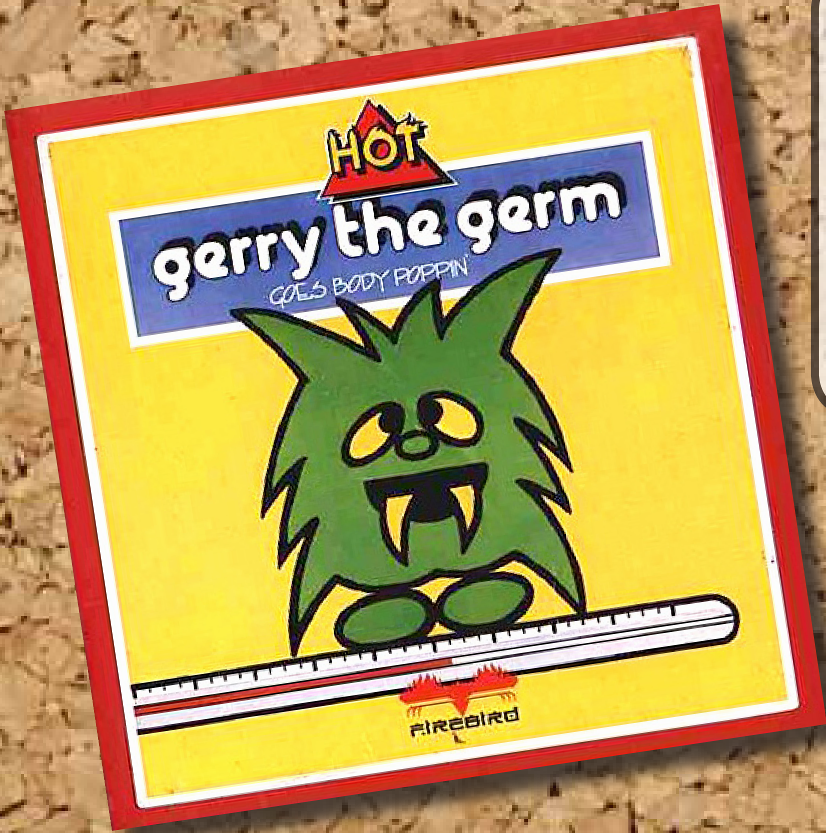
THE GALLERY

featuring Tony Hart

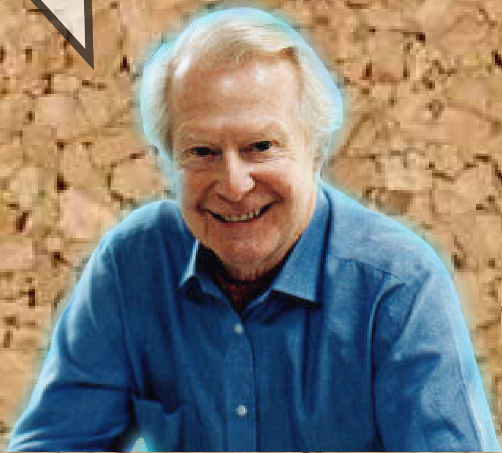




A wonderful image here from David in Gloucester. A strong central composition using a carefully chosen palette of colours. One can almost feel the sense of movement, and the lithe, well muscled figure is very elegant and almost sensual in its nature, captured by a thousand hands that caress it, rubbing against the smooth flesh in a sort of dance of ecstasy, the beat of your heart pulsating and throbbing, throbbing, excitement builds until you are encompassed in a heady delirium of pleasure and feel flowing from you the - *ahem* well, it's a nice picture David, well done..



This is from Michael in Bolton. What a pile of crap. Poorly conceived and badly drawn, this picture actually makes me physically sick. You stink, Michael.



Amanda in Chipshop sent this in. I like the cute little tortoise. Or is it a turtle? You know, I can never tell the difference, except turtle has a slightly richer flavour and is not as stringy. But you get more meat on a tortoise. I love to scoop it out with a spoon!





DISCS OF DEATH

PUBLISHER: ARTIC COMPUTING LTD • **YEAR:** 1985 • **MEMORY:** 48K

I've set myself a challenge here. I'm going to write this review without a single mention of Tron.

Oh, bugger.

Well, the plot of this game has obviously nothing to do with Tron as you have to play in an arena and become a Disc Warrior Champion. You battle to the death in an un-Tronlike way while throwing discs which are completely different to the ones in Tron and jumping from platform to platform with only your barrier skill to protect you (which I might add bears absolutely no resemblance to the one in the Discs of Tron arcade game, honest).

So there you have it. Discs of Death (or Disks of Death if you believe the title screen) is probably one of the least subtle rip-offs of the classic Discs of Tron arcade game. Now, I quite like the arcade game so the prospect of a Speccy version is not something that I find completely unpleasant.

First impressions are mixed. The graphics are somewhat bland, consisting of a simple square pattern and faux-vector platforms, and the game uses the default Spectrum font, which is always the sign of low production values. The joystick controls are also somewhat counter intuitive as well - to move your aiming target (which slides along the back wall of the arena) you have to constantly fumble with the fire



Raise your hands by pushing down. Makes perfect sense.

button as each press changes its direction. Keyboard control is only a little more sensible as it allows you different buttons to move the target left and right, but the keys are all grouped along the number row and are not redefinable.



The duellers engage in a spot of ungraceful synchronised leaping.

This game is actually quite addictive. Sure, it's frustratingly unfair sometimes (particularly the homing shots that cannot be deflected and kill you even after you have zapped the other guy). It might be a goofy, messed up (and somewhat repetitive) version of Discs of Tron, but I'd actually say it's worth a few rounds, but only a few. **SP**

So I was pretty much ready to write this one off. It looks a bit cheap, is fiddly to control and has constant sound effects that make you feel like you're being attacked by a swarm of angry bees. But strangely, I discovered that I'd been playing for quite some time, determined to get to the next level and finding much satisfaction in seeing my opponent disintegrating each round.



The Rating Potato



VERDICT: A bit rough round the edges but give it a shot.



CAKE OF THE MONTH

YUMMY YUMMY YUMMY, I'VE GOT CAKE IN MY TUMMY

This month's cake is a much loved after-school classic, the Yellow French Fancy. This particular little delight is a rare beast as it is often the first to be snatched up after the packet is opened, leading to many a tearful retreat from the kitchen. The whole concept of the French Fancy is truly remarkable: a soft sponge square coated in delicious lemon icing. But the true stroke of genius lies in the nipple-like blob of buttercream that sits hidden on the top like a baby about to pop forth from a lemony flavoured expectant mother.



The Yellow French Fancy is the perfect accompaniment to many games. The more logical and mathematical mind will enjoy this treat most whilst playing Ant Attack. The isometric nature of the Yellow French Fancy works exceedingly well with the style of the game itself, bringing out the true flavour. Be warned however, that you should not try to enjoy the Yellow French Fancy while playing the pseudo-sequel Zombie Zombie. This game is best played in conjunction with the Brown French Fancy.

Those of a more emotional nature and passionate disposition will find that the Yellow French Fancy works extremely well during intense bouts of Sam Fox's Strip Poker, due to the aforementioned nipular nature of the cake. The inclusion of two in every pack also provides an exquisite symmetry to the game itself.

If you have exhausted your supply, you may still be able to alleviate your desire for French Fancies somewhat by watching Sophie Marceau in The World is Not Enough.





Rambo: First Blood Part II : Ocean Software Ltd : 1985



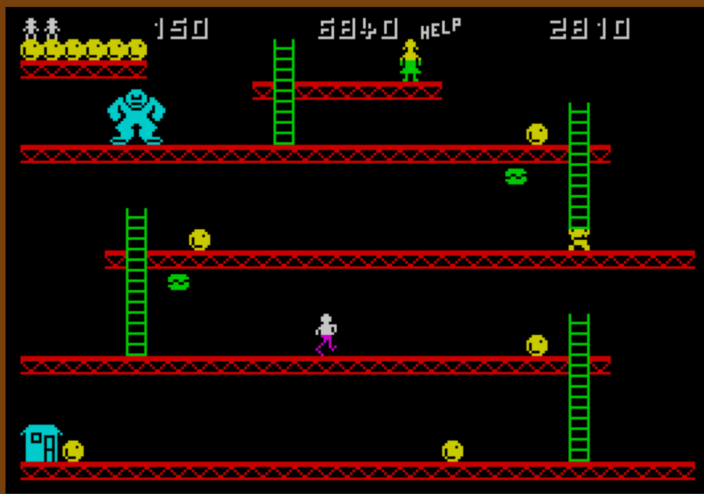
Bosconian '87 : Mastertronic : 1987

KILLER KONG

PUBLISHER: BLABY COMPUTER GAMES • **YEAR:** 1983 • **MEMORY:** 48K

There's one thing I really want to know. Who is the person shipping all these gorillas in from Africa and then letting them loose on construction sites? I mean, there has to be someone doing it, but I just can't figure out why. And how come the barrel storage department is always on the top floor? If they just stored pillows up there, half these problems just wouldn't arise.

Anyway, you might have guessed by now that Killer Kong is another one of those Donkey Kong clones that we all love so much. Our hero (that would be you) is a curious sort of fellow. Emerging from a very small shed (goodness knows what he was doing in there), the poor chap runs about looking like he has two broken legs (probably done while trying to fit himself into his tiny shed). Through a series of girders, ladders and the occasional lift, he has to make his way to the top of the screen and rescue his lady.



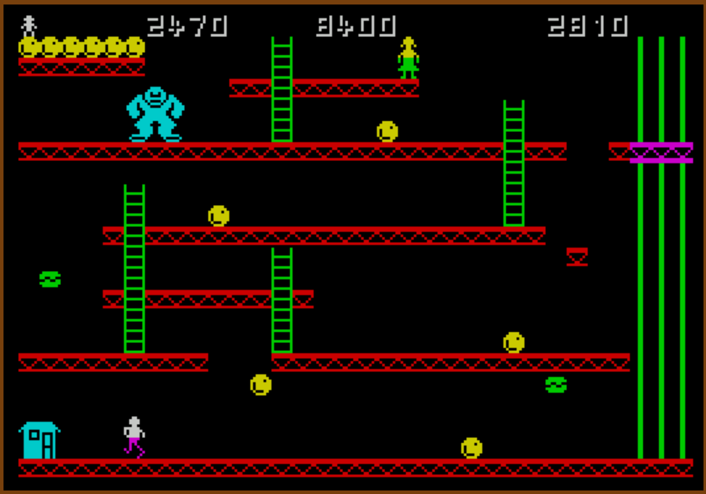
A rare screenshot taken of the barrels not flickering.



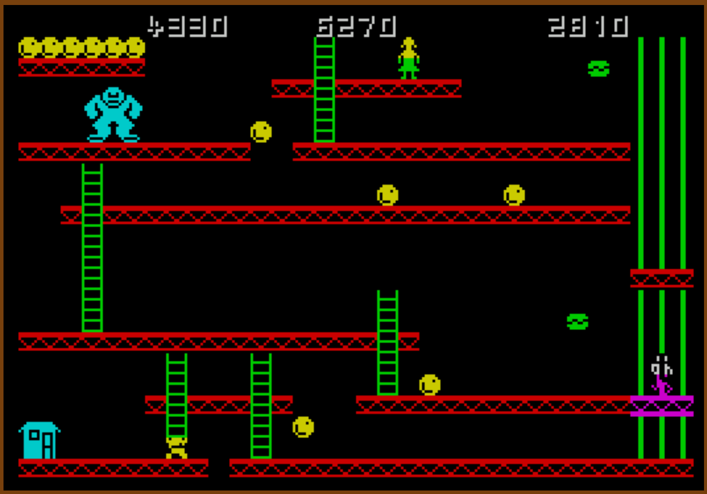
She's a fickle kind of girl, because rather than her heart swelling with joy as you approach, her love for you is counting down the whole time. So presumably, even though you may take all your effort to get her away from the sweaty ape, she's going to dump you anyway.

Speaking of the ape, this sucker is mad. Really mad. So mad in fact that he slides back and forth (presumably

he's wearing roller skates) and occasionally lobs a barrel at you. These barrels come thick and fast at you at all times, but it's lucky that despite your oddly bendy legs you are actually pretty good at jumping. Maybe they work like springs or something.



Getting captured time after time, you begin to suspect your girl has a thing for apes.



Don't jump off the lift from too high or it's splatto.

Killer Kong might actually be pretty good if it didn't play like a magazine type-in. The movement is really jerky - character square movement instead of pixel precision, and the barrels tend to flicker enough to make things really tricky, particularly at times when they are coming at you from all directions. It's obvious the programmers had to take some short cuts: the girders are all straight and not slanted like the original and instead of a cool hammerin' hammer, you just get rather unappetising green hamburgers that do nothing but provide some bonus points.

Stupidly, when you hit Game Over, the game chooses to start up again without pause or a return to a title screen - it just assumes you're having another go immediately. This is quite presumptuous, especially considering that after 3 or 4 goes, you're likely to switch it off and play something a little more polished. **SP**



VERDICT: Jerky gameplay and flickery sprites make Kong mad.

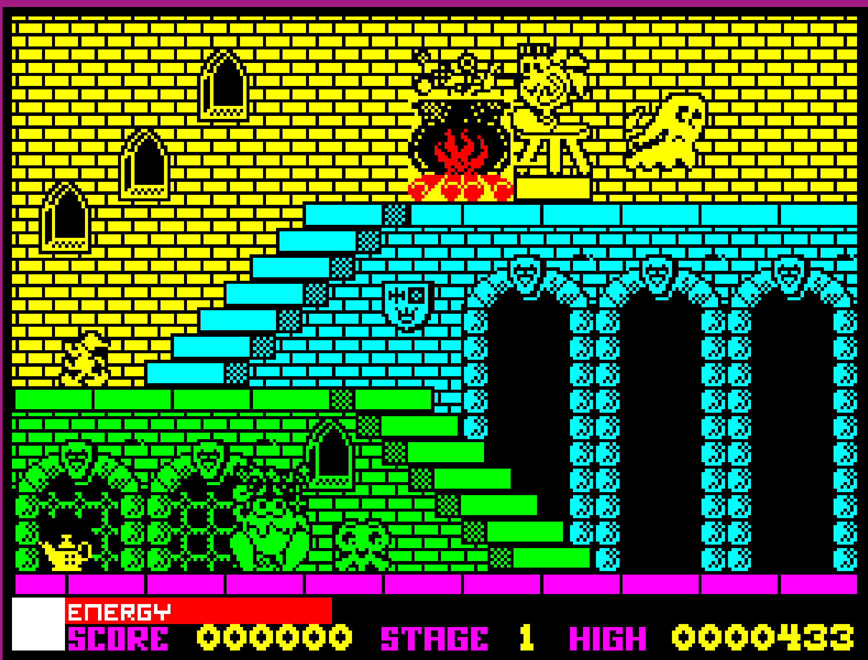
OLLI & LISSA

PUBLISHER: FIREBIRD SOFTWARE LTD • **YEAR:** 1986 • **MEMORY:** 48K

Ghosts generally get a bad rep in games, so it's nice that Olli and Lissa has you helping Sir Humphrey, the ghost of Shilmore Castle. You see, the castle has been purchased by some chap with a whole pile of cash, and is due to be shipped from Scotland to America. Sir Humphrey is a little narked about this because he's a ghost that you can see, and nobody is afraid of those any more. So he needs eight ingredients to brew up a potion that will make him invisible.

What is all boils down to is an eight-screen platform game that has you avoiding monsters and jumping over dangerous rivers to collect the required doobries. 'Only eight screens?' I hear you cry. Well there are two reasons for this. The first is that it was originally a budget release. The second is that is it harder than winning the 100 metres sprint with no arms or legs. Or torso.

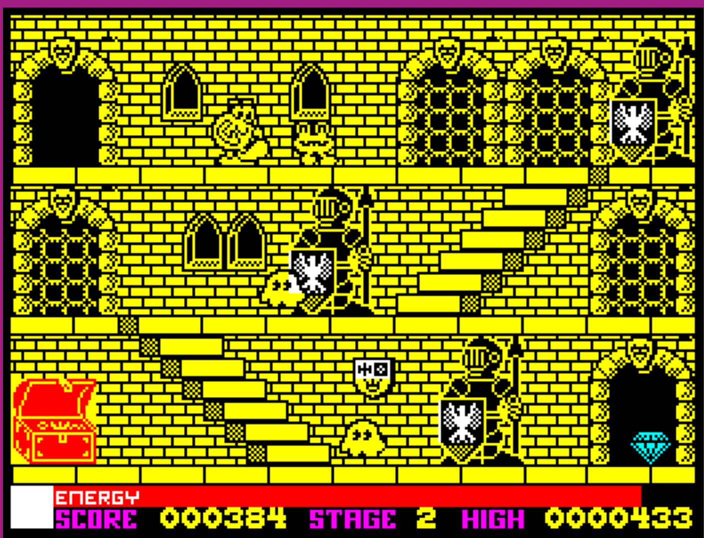
Olli and Lissa is not just hard. It's stupid hard. Some games are difficult in a reasonable and understandable way. This is just bad, bad design. I can't count the number of times that I've been killed jumping over the VERY FIRST enemy. You have to be pixel perfect with every jump, something that is far more difficult in this game than in something like Jet Set Willy. At one point I was having flashbacks to Jack and the Beanstalk, which still haunts me to this day.



It's the first screen and the collision detection is already beginning to wind me up.

This is a pity as there is much to like about old Ol' and Lis'. The graphics are very colourful and really well drawn, especially the cartoony sprites. Presentation is great as well - when you Game Over, Sir Humphrey comes along

and bashes you over a head with his broom for being such a loser (although after the 23rd time this does begin to grate a little). The sound effects are decent enough and the music is good, but none of this can save it from what is essentially an overly frustrating experience that just isn't any fun to play. Olli and Lissa is like a really cute looking puppy that you take home, only to find out it's actually an angry badger with a weak bladder who only eats eggy-bread and demands to go for a walk at 2am every morning. Or something. **SP**



Stage 2 is even harder than Stage 1. Which is probably why I've never got to Stage 3.

POPULAR GHOSTS



The Ghosts of Motley Hall

I'm too young to remember this. Um, honest.

Rentaghost

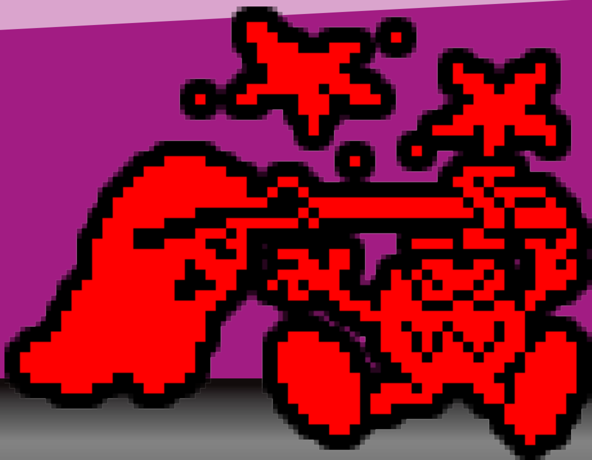
Hands up if you wanted to give Mr Claypole a good slap in the face.





Steve Jobs

Hands up if you wanted to give Steve Jobs a good slap in the face.





VERDICT: It may look fresh, but it's all mouldy on the inside.



THE PARSON'S NOSE

The unpopular fleshy arse end of the magazine

1982

THE WAR

It's early days in the war, but the Commode 64 is already showing its true colours - or not (har har). The visual extravaganza that is Choplifter is a fine example of utter graphical dullness. A bland white chopper with



If this were on the Speccy, it would look super-cool.

a boring grey floor. Hell, even the red looks like it's faded in the sun. They'll have to come up with better than this to hold a candle to the Speccy, but I doubt they will as I am going to construct a massive shrine to Uncle Clive which will generate huge amounts of SPECtral energy to deconvert all those brainwashed by that ugly beige box. I urge you all to do the same if we are to be victorious.

MOVIES

Due to be released later this year is a new movie by Muppets creator Jim Henson. It's called The Dark Crystal and is a fantasy adventure about some elves or something. Because Jim Henson is involved, I'm sure it will be a laugh-a-minute comedy, and I'm expecting some cameo appearances from everybody's favourite green frog. I can't wait.

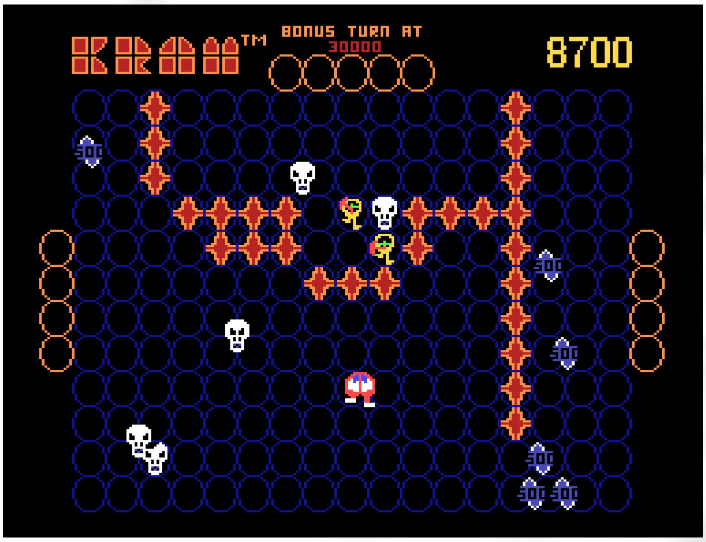


That's rather a strange looking pussy.

Also due for release is another fantasy adventure called Conan the Barbarian. Unfortunately they couldn't afford a famous actor to star, so they just got this Austrian bodybuilder with a funny name. I expect it will be a flop.

ARCADES

New in arcades is 'Kram' by Taito. You play a red blob with eyes who has to collect all the bonus points on the map while avoiding the evil floating skulls. You can place walls to block their path, but there are also nasty little diggers that chop down your barriers and let the skulls loose.

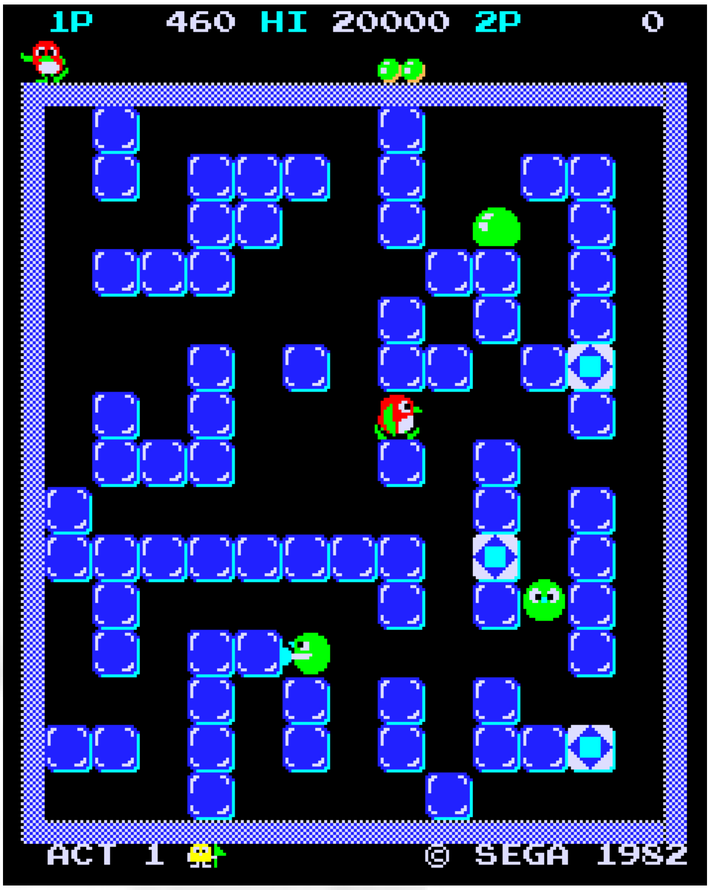


It's not Horace, it's Kram - the new game from Taito.

It's a pretty tricky game, but it could make a great conversion for the Speccy. I hope someone picks it up.

'Pengo' by Sega is another cute game that deserves a conversion. You are a penguin who is stuck in a maze and must avoid the green slimes that are after him. You have no weapons, but you can push ice blocks to slide and crush your enemies.

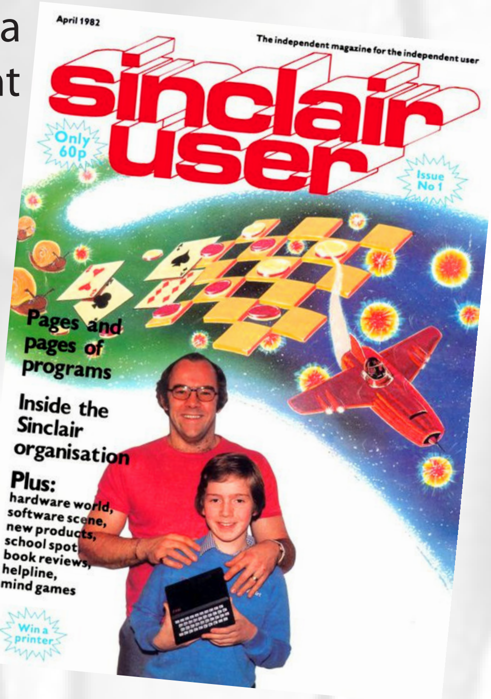
I found this game very difficult and it will require a lot of practice to master, but it looks great and has some excellent sound - there's even music while you play!



You need lighting fast reactions to win in Pengo.

MAGAZINES

Exciting news for Spectrum owners.. April this year sees a brand new magazine called Sinclair User. Available for only 60p, this promises 'pages and pages of programs'. Hopefully the mag will be great and not turn into a self-important unfunny rag with awful reviews and editors that love to slap 'exclusive' over everything. But I'm sure that won't happen.



sunteam

www.pcengine.co.uk/sunteam